

# AQA Quality Forum 2018 Summary Report

## Introduction

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AQA held a Forum with university quality managers on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018. The purpose of the day was to examine current and emerging topics in quality assurance through a series of sessions led by quality managers. The topics were academic integrity, assessment, graduate profiles and graduate outcomes, contract and sessional teaching and facilitating and supporting organisational change. This report provides a summary of the sessions and the main issues discussed.

## Academic Integrity

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The first session addressed the topic of academic integrity, noting the attention that was being paid to contract cheating in particular in other jurisdictions, factors that could contribute to its increase and what measures were available to manage this issue. The Forum discussed how universities managed and monitored cases of academic dishonesty. There are differences in terms of whether academic dishonesty is managed centrally and the types of cases that are reported and recorded.

Internationally, findings of large-scale research into motivations and prevalence of contract cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty is being published. This includes work by Tracy Bretag, Wendy Sutherland-Smith, Rebecca Awdy and Thomas Lancaster. The Forum noted the emphasis placed on assessment and integrity in the Australian Higher Education Quality Network conference held in June 2018<sup>1</sup>.

Suggestions for good practice included:

- Taking a values-based approach that reflected the totality of academic honesty, i.e. included integrity in research and modelling of good academic practice in teaching,
- Connecting academic integrity to scholarly practices of the discipline,
- Authentic, meaningful and respectful assessment,
- Visibility, consistency and transparency in referring, investigating and reporting breaches, and
- Providing guidelines and other resources for staff and students.

## Assessment

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The second session presented a range of practices associated with assessment and asked how assessment was reviewed. The practices were mainly concerned with management of assessment, such as use of aegrotats and special considerations, time taken for assessment including time taken to provide feedback, moderation and assessment policies, rather than design of assessment itself.

The University of Auckland is reviewing aspects of its assessment policy and AUT has implemented management of special considerations within its learning management system.

The relationship with and contribution to other aspects of student life including engagement and well-being was discussed, as were the implications for academic staff. Moderation and confidence around outcome standards and equivalences were particular issues. It was noted that CUAP processes provide

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hes.edu.au/resources/2018-higher-education-quality-network-conference>

for pre-moderation of assessment standards and assessment is included in university programme and/or department/discipline reviews.

The Forum raised use of automated marking as an area for further exploration.

## Graduate Profiles and Graduate Outcomes

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This session took the form of a workshop and examined how universities can provide evidence that students have had the opportunity to attain (graduate) attributes and evidence that attributes have been attained. Approaches included mapping curricula to attributes, the development of co-curricular transcripts or inclusion of co-curricular activities on university transcripts, professional accreditation reports and graduate and employer surveys. Some universities are using curriculum management systems or other software to support this. Curriculum management systems and learning outcomes matrices were considered to provide higher quality evidence that graduate attributes had been achieved.

## Contract and Sessional Teaching

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Dr Amanda Gilbert facilitated the discussion on this topic which is prominent in academic quality debates in Australia but has not received a great deal of attention in New Zealand to date. However, the view is that numbers of contract or sessional staff have increased. Increases in flexibility of delivery may also lead to increases in use of sessional and casual contracts.

One of the first challenges in examining any impact of contract or sessional staff on teaching and the student experience is gaining a sense of the numbers involved as a wide range of position titles are used and definitions of what constitutes 'sessional' vary. The term can encompass early career staff who are teaching or tutoring a single class, professional or adjunct staff and retired academics who wish to remain engaged with students and teaching. Potential challenges for students include sessional staff not being able to answer questions about other parts of the university (although this could also apply to full-time permanent staff) or availability for responding to queries.

There are also challenges in being a sessional staff member including isolation, lack of resources and lack of knowledge or access to administrative processes. It may be a 'new career norm' for some and a personal choice for others. Sessional or contract staff may have different support and development needs from full-time, research-active, academic staff. The Forum's attention was drawn to the Blasst framework for sessional staff<sup>2</sup>.

## Facilitating and Supporting Organisational Change

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The final session explored how academic quality interacts with organisational change as quality assurance and enhancement processes can provide a rationale or imperative for change. The level of large scale change in universities was evident in Cycle 5 academic audit reports and there was little expectation that this would be different for Cycle 6. The value of change processes engaging with subject matter experts, including those with expertise in academic quality, was stressed. However, the impact of change on quality managers and the need for support was also noted.

## Acknowledgements

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<sup>2</sup> <http://blasst.edu.au/index.html>